

Guard, Reserve forces need experienced leaders to adapt to changes

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WASHINGTON – Experienced people in the military’s seven reserve components should exert their leadership skills as they help their respective components adapt to new challenges and demands, their top officers said yesterday.

“We need your leadership. We need your view, and it needs to be a joint view,” Army Lt. Gen. Clyde A. Vaughn, commander of the Army National Guard, told about 140 senior officers and noncommissioned officers attending the Reserve Components National Security Course.

The National Defense University presents the course for reserve and National Guard members moving on to joint command management and staff jobs in multinational, intergovernmental or joint national security settings.

Vaughn joined senior leaders from the Army Reserve, Navy Reserve, Marine Corps Reserve, Air Force Reserve, Coast Guard Reserve and Air National Guard during a panel discussion to offer a Washington viewpoint of the challenges the reserve components face.

He noted the huge changes within the Army National Guard over the past six years that have taken it from a strategic to an operational reserve deeply committed to the war on terror. New policies, procedures and processes had to be put in place to support the shift. More resources had to be directed to the Guard. Recruiting strategies needed to change so the Guard could continue filling its ranks with high-quality members. It began modularizing the force.

Vaughn said more changes are needed, but that those already made are creating “as powerful a National Guard as we have probably had at any time in our nation.”

Vaughn told the class members they, too, will be faced with these challenges as they assume ever-more-responsible positions within their components. “You will have to lead institutional change,” he said.

Brig. Gen. David Blackledge, commander of the Army Reserve’s 352nd Civil Affairs Command, emphasized the

vast civilian skills members of the reserve components are bringing to that effort.

More than 175,000 of these “skill-rich warrior-citizens” have been mobilized since the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks, he said, and this rate is likely to continue for the foreseeable future, he said.

That will demand continued changes in the way the service is structured and trains and mobilizes its troops, he said. Among the changes being instituted is a deployment schedule that gives more predictability for reservists, their families and their employers, and more emphasis on training before mobilization, he said.

The old paradigm for the reserve components was to mobilize, train, and deploy, in that order, he said. “We are changing to train, mobilize, then deploy. So we are providing a lot of the training that would have taken place post-mobilization to pre-mobilization.”

Lt. Gen. John Bergman, commander of Marine Forces Reserve and Marine Forces North, shared Blackledge’s concern about the challenges reserve component members face as they balance the competing demands of their military and civilian careers.

Reservists need more predictability than the active force so they can maintain that balance, he said. “For the reserve component, our employers don’t really care whether we are across the street or across the world,” he said. “All they know is that we are not at that desk.”

Bergman advocated a rotation schedule that provides one year away – factoring in pre-deployment training, deployment and post-deployment processing – followed by five years at home before another deployment.

Capt. Harry Myers, deputy chief of the Navy Reserve, described its shift from a Cold War construct designed “to greet the Soviets as they came through the Greenland-Iceland-Norway gap.”

Change has taken place “at light-speed pace,” he said, with reservists no longer spending the bulk of their time at their local reserve centers – now called Navy operational support centers.

“It’s unusual to see them there,

because they are ordinarily at their gaining command. They are out there in those units that best support the fleet and bring that capability,” Myers said. “And quite frankly, the fleet values these folks far more than ever before.”

Since 9/11, 41,000 of the Navy Reserve’s 70,000 people have deployed, often serving in untraditional roles, he said. “Many times in the Gulf, we have more sailors there with boots on ground in the desert than we have sailors on the ships in the Gulf,” Myers told the group. “And it’s because it’s one team, one fight.”

Maj. Gen. Rita Aragon, the Air National Guard assistant to the Air Force’s deputy chief of staff for manpower and personnel, cited big strategic issues facing the Air Guard. It’s looking at ways to develop “adaptable airmen” who can move between jobs and weapons systems as needed, and a more agile force.

“We need to be a more agile force to be able to do whatever it is our nation wants us to do,” she said.

Aragon acknowledged there’s “a lot of angst” as the Air Guard downsizes its force and converts some of its units and missions. “So we are trying to find out what kind of career paths do we really need to develop and what kind of people

do we need to have for these and what kind of weapons systems are we going to use,” she said. “And those are crucial issues on a strategic level,” she said.

Brig. Gen. Charles Ethredge, deputy chief of the Air Force Reserve, said his component faces many of the Air Guard’s same concerns as it, too, undergoes sweeping changes.

The Air Force’s Future Total Force initiative is cutting through traditional roles for the Air Force Reserve as well as the Air Guard to increase overall combat capability. At the same time, Base Realignment and Closure plans and the force reduction efforts are having a big impact on the Air Force Reserve and its members.

Ethredge said the Air Force Reserve is facing up to these challenges as it works take care of its people and identify ways for them to continue serving.

Coast Guard Rear Adm. J. Timothy Riker, director of the Coast Guard Reserve’s Deployable Operations Group Commissioning Cell, cited the component’s increased role in promoting security both at home and overseas.

Riker, a retired reservist, was reactivated to stand up the group that’s considered a centerpiece of the Coast Guard’s tougher security measures.

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